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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 004360

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [ASEC](#) [SNAR](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: UNDER SECRETARY FEITH MEETS WITH PRESIDENT URIBE

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons

1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶11. (C) On May 3, 2005 Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith discussed Colombia's democratic security strategy and concerns about Venezuela with President Alvaro Uribe. Uribe described U.S. assistance as critical to counterterror and counterdrug successes. Feith assured Uribe that the U.S. was committed to continued support. Uribe expressed concern about President Chavez's ties to Colombian guerrilla groups, his efforts to spread unrest in nearby countries, including Bolivia and Nicaragua, and close relationship to Fidel Castro. Uribe acknowledged he had no proof for a public case to denounce Chavez and that, until there is proof, public criticism of Chavez would lack credibility. Uribe said the OAS Secretary General election had been swayed by Chavez and that this had to be seen as a defeat for us, meaning the U.S. and Colombia. Feith agreed Chavez was a threat to regional stability and noted that Central Europeans, businessmen, journalists, and local opposition were the best vehicles to expose Chavez's violations of democratic freedoms. End summary.

Uribe Eager to Stay the Course

¶12. (C) On May 3, 2005, President Uribe told Under Secretary Feith that U.S. support was key to the progress Colombia was making against narcoterrorists. He emphasized that there was still a long way to go and that U.S. assistance beyond Plan Colombia was critical to staying the course and consolidating success. Feith assured Uribe the U.S. was committed to supporting Colombia and was proud to be associated with Colombia's counterdrug and counterterror accomplishments. He welcomed the opportunity to discuss objectives for the U.S.-Colombia relationship and for the hemisphere during the May 4 to 6 Bilateral Working Group in Cartagena.

Venezuela a Growing Concern

¶13. (C) Uribe expressed concern about Venezuela's threat to regional stability. He said Chavez has ties to Colombian guerrilla groups, is interfering in neighboring countries, especially Bolivia and Nicaragua, to create political unrest, and maintains close relations with Fidel Castro, whom he subsidizes with inexpensive oil. Uribe said he had just met with former Bolivian President Jaime Quiroga, who stated these concerns (Quiroga, Uribe added, plans to run against Evo Morales for the Presidency). In a recent meeting with Uribe, Chavez swore he did not support the FARC, but admitted that some members of his political party are FARC supporters. In response to the Ambassador's inquiry if Chavez would try to influence the Colombian elections, Uribe said he had heard rumors that Chavez is giving support to the leftist Polo Democratico (PDI), but had no proof. Uribe expressed frustration with Chavez's use of trade for coercion. Colombia depends on trade with Venezuela and Chavez makes trade difficult or denies foreign exchange rights to Colombian firms whenever political relations become tense. Uribe said Colombia exports USD 1.7 billion to Venezuela and imports USD 1.2 billion.

¶14. (C) Uribe said he had rumors and surmises of Chavez's destabilizing and illegal activities, and noted the GOC was committed to finding evidence to prove the point. He said we need to make public our intelligence on Chavez's subversive activities and undermining of democratic institutions in order for our criticism to be credible.

¶15. (C) Uribe emphasized that NGO organizations such as the OAS should monitor Venezuela's democracy and pressure Chavez to stop suppressing democratic freedoms. U/S Feith agreed that Venezuela was a threat to regional stability and to U.S. and Colombian interests. He also agreed that NGOs, journalists, businessmen, and Venezuelan opposition figures could be effective vehicles to speak out against Chavez's violations of democracy, with Colombians, Americans, and others supporting them. Central Europeans newly liberated from communism are the most clear-headed on this subject.

16. (C) Uribe praised the efforts of Secretary Rice during the campaign to elect the new OAS Secretary General, but expressed concern that newly elected Secretary General Insulza would not criticize Chavez. Uribe said Chavez persuaded 11 Caribbean countries to back Insulza. The OAS Secretary General election was a defeat for us, meaning the

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U.S. and Colombia, he said. "We can put the best face on it, but no amount of make-up can disguise that it was a defeat."

17. (U) USDP Feith has reviewed and cleared this cable.
WOOD